A New Type of Producer

By JOHN B. WALLACE

FOR the past decade the motion picture world has been sadly in need of new blood. The production end of the game has been dominated by two classes of men; the dreamers who wished to do great, almost impossible things but were lacking in business ability and commercial training, and the men who viewed the films as purely a commercial proposition and were willing to prostitute the screen with any type of picture that would bring in the money. The first class of producers had wonderful ideas but have failed because of the lack of business instinct, the second class has succeeded financially but has brought the industry to the verge of ruin through their moral callousness.

What was needed was a producer who combined sound financial sense with high ideals and in Benjamin Bowles Hampton the screen obtained an accession that completely filled the bill.

Hampton comes of good American stock on both sides. The Hamptons and Randolphs of Virginia and the Bowles of New England are of the oldest white families on our youthful continent. Mr. Hampton is in his forty-sixth year, is married and has five children. He is a clean-minded, clean-living citizen who is ready to fight at the drop of the hat for a principle. Time has tempered his radicalism but has not tempered his fighting spirit.

Hampton comes of a newspaper family and at the age of fifteen he was running true to type—no pun intended—by conducting a country weekly at Macomb, Illinois. When twenty he moved to Galesburg, Illinois, and ran a daily and weekly paper for five years.

He then succumbed to the lure of New York where he first engaged in general journalistic work and then went into advertising.

The advertising agency which he established proved to be very successful and finally he was tempted to try the publishing game. He bought a publication that was on its last legs, renamed it *Hampton's Magazine* and in a few years had increased its circulation from 12,000 to 440,000. But Hampton had tried to do what is practically impossible for a man without unlimited capital; that is, to run a strictly independent magazine.

He went after the big corporations, especially the railroads. His attack was so vigorous, his facts so unassailable and his logic so convincing that the interests became alarmed. They resolved to put him out of business and using the old tactics of frightening his stockholders and shutting off his bank credit they succeeded. In 1911 Hampton gave up his magazine and flat broke set about looking for a job.

While conducting his advertising agency Hampton had handled the advertising of the American Tobacco Company and when the Supreme Court dissolved the tobacco trust he was offered the position of vice president of the new company. In his new position besides having charge of the sales he looked after the public policies of the company in its relation to social and legislative affairs.

He was with this company for six years. Then the possibilities of the motion picture began to interest him. He invested some money in stock in various companies, and finally decided to go into the business himself as a producer.

Although the star system was all the rage among producers at that time, Hampton saw far enough into the future to realize that it was but a phase of a new industry and that the story was the thing. He tried out his theory with Rex Beach's novel, "The Barrier." When it was finished he was unable to sell it. The exhibitors told him he was crazy.

A picture without a star would be a frost. Finally he was driven to hire his own theater in New York in order to show it. The picture was such a success that the prices were run up to $1.50 a seat, a price never heard of for a picture house before. "The Barrier" is still running after seven years.

Hampton continued to dabble in motion picture stocks, biding his time to go into the game on the scale he desired. In 1918 he decided that the time was ripe to put his ideas to practical test. He went to California and spent nearly two years investigating producing conditions. Then he started lining up authors. Some of those whose works he obtained were Zane Grey, Winston Churchill, Stewart Edward White, Emerson Hough, Harry Leon Wilson, Vincente Blasco-Ibanez, Upton Sinclair, Owen Wister, George W. Cable, Gene Stratton Porter, B. M. Bower, Thomas Nelson Page and William Allen White.

He then proceeded to star the author and to pick the cast to suit the story, not to make the story to suit the star as had been the universal custom.

In his latest picture, which is not at this writing released, William Allen White's "A Certain Rich Man," Hampton has made a radical departure from the accepted type of picture. At a preview recently held it created a sensation among the newspaper men who viewed it.

In the same vigorous manner in which he went gunning for the men responsible for the abuses of corporation power, Hampton has gone after the men who are responsible for the prostitution of the motion picture. Last fall he declared war upon the pictures of sex appeal. In speeches and magazine articles he scathingly denounced the men who through the screen were corrupting the taste and morals of the coming generation.

At first the men behind the pictures were aghast at this attack from within their own ranks, but the wave of public sentiment aroused by Hampton and other agencies outside the industry convinced some of them that Hampton was right. Instead of fighting him they announced they were about to "clean up" the industry from the inside. Today he stands in the unique position of having his bitterest business rivals compelled

BENJAMIN BOWLES HAMPTON

to take action and aid him in his crusade against the conscienceless producers.

"I felt the best way was to attempt to make the producers themselves clean houses," Hampton told me as we sat in his study at his beautiful home in the Wilshire district in Los Angeles. "When the public attempts to reform an industry it is apt to swing the pendulum too far and wreck the business. No picture should be shown upon the screen that is not fit for children to see. There is no excuse in art or plot for showing unclothed women in the pictures.

"Unexpurgated editions of classic authors are kept under lock and key so that the children cannot read them, yet these same children see in the picture houses every day illustrated stories that would put to shame the ancient writers.

"The trouble with the picture industry is that the men at the head of it have not fully realized its scope and significance," he went on. "Not since the days of the entertainments in ancient Rome has there been a form of amusement with such universal appeal. Books and magazines have only a limited number of readers, limited because of lack of opportunity and education. The speaking stage also can have but a limited patronage because of the prices that must be charged and lack of theaters with adequate facilities. But motion pictures can go everywhere, can reach every type of humanity from the highest to the lowest. They need no elaborate stage settings. They can be shown in a barn if necessary. The audience does not need to be educated, not even literate to grasp the story. They are absolutely a new medium of expression, such a medium as has never been known before in the world's history.

"Another mistake that has been made by producers is that pictures are allied to the theater. This is perhaps because most of the men in the business today are recruited from the stage. That is why the star system was adopted and why the spectacle picture became dominant. But it is, in my opinion, a mistaken view.

"The action in a motion picture is much more closely allied to the action in a novel than it is to a play. A play must have a series of dramatic climaxes to be a success. A novel tells a story, it may be dramatic or it may not. The screen can be made to tell that same story and tell it smoothly like the novel told it, not in a series of big climaxes.

"The script is the big thing, in fact the whole thing in a motion picture. A certain responsibility rests upon the director and upon the actors but if it isn't in the script it isn't in the picture. That is only logic. The whole picture industry has been based upon false and illogical premises. First the actor, the star, was the whole thing, next the director was featured, but now at last they are coming to see that it is the writer and the writer alone who is really important."

Mr. Hampton spends but very little time with the camera man during the actual filming of his pictures. But in his study is a big white screen and there every shot is gone over carefully. If a friend has a daughter or sister whom he wishes to put in the pictures, Hampton wastes no time in questions or vain argument. She is told to go out to the studio and have some shots taken. Then the screen in Hampton's study tells the tale as to whether she will do.

In his study over his big garage this writer, publicist, financier and producer, who has regained in his pictures the fortune he lost in his magazine venture, plans his reforms. For Benjamin Bowles Hampton is essentially a reformer, a crusader. With his mixture of Puritan and Cavalier blood what else could he be?

How Senator-Scientist Views Farm Problem

Concluded from page 7

will flock to the cities as soon as they grow up. In fact, the most saddening aspect of many farming districts now is the scarcity if not the entire absence of young men and women who already have gone en masse to the cities.

"The problem is a farming one in the primary sense only. The matter of earnings is only incidental. The great question is keeping people, and the right sort of people, on the farms to produce the food the country's population must have. You must remember that no man is bound to the farm as was once the case; theoretically anyone there can leave as thousands and thousands have done.

"And they will continue to leave as long as the best prizes of life lie outside of farming. We are already on the verge of becoming importers instead of exporters of foodstuffs. When (if we should) we become dependent on foreign countries for food, our country will be in a dangerous position. If present tendencies continue that is liable to happen within less than ten years.

"It will be much easier to meet and solve the crisis before than after it comes. This is the lesson of other countries and of our own, in the last year or two, with regard to railroads and merchant shipping.

"The farmer must be recognized as a business man and industrialist and given the protection and the help that the country has given to other businesses and industries. He must have the credit facilities that go with sound business. He must be informed on national and international conditions that will affect the demand and the prices paid for his product, so that he may not produce surpluses that will be wasted for lack of market, and yet avoid deficiencies that may cause thousands to go hungry. He must have some say as to when and how he shall sell what he produces, just as other business men can hold or sell as conditions warrant. The processes of distribution must be simplified and cheapened, for the benefit of consumers as well as producers. Opportunities for speculation must be reduced. He must be enabled to keep up his plant, for that plant, as until recently could be done, cannot be duplicated whenever the old one wears out.

"The farmer must not only be enabled to live, without taking from coming generations the wealth Nature spent centuries storing in the soil and fairly to accumulate without depending on unearned increment; he must be enabled to live as other people live, that is, he must have his measure of the comforts, the recreations, the luxuries, as it were, which progress has provided cheaply for non-farmers. This means good and well-equipped homes, churches, schools, roads.

"The American farmer can do much through cooperation and he is now ready, as never before, to act in concert with all in his class. But he can't do it all. Others must help, and they should help, for the agricultural problems of the country involve farmers only incidentally. You must not forget that if famine came, the farmer would have first call on what food is available. Hence in the last analysis the subject is more important to city folk than to the farming population.

"Its importance may not be realized by city people now, though the tendency of food prices to remain *high* despite the collapse of farm prices should bring it home to them. What they should remember is that when the crisis comes they will suffer most and it will be too late to find easily applied remedies."

Government Success on Waterways

Concluded from page 3

retained in service. Old-type boats, mainly packets, with which the barges have been handled in the first stages of the development of this service, are being discarded as rapidly as the new towboats are delivered. While the 40 new steel barges will add much to the carrying capacity of the service, most of the old barges will be retained, the officials believing traffic soon will require all available carriers.

For the Warrior River service proper, between Mobile and Port Birmingham, towboats of lower power than those in use on the Mississippi are being installed. The first of these, the "Cordova" is in service as these lines are written, and two others, the "Demopolis" and the "Tuscaloosa," about to be delivered. These boats are of the same general type as the towboats described above for the Mississippi River service, but are smaller in size, being 140 feet long, 24 feet molded beam, and eight feet nine inches deep, with a draft of six feet. They are equipped to burn coal, but otherwise the propelling and other machinery and its location is the same as on the larger towboats.

Barges for use in this Warrior, Tombigbee and Black Warrior river service, are of wood, and of the open-hopper type. Twenty of these have been provided for use in the coal trade in and out of the Birmingham district.

The third branch of the service, between New Orleans and points on Mobile Bay, Warrior River, Tombigbee River and Black Warrior River, is getting four towboat-barges, which not only can handle cargo in their own holds and on deck, but can tow fleets of barges as well. These towboat-barges are 280 feet long, 49 feet beam and nine feet deep, drawing about five feet of water. They are planned to handle coal from the Alabama fields into New Orleans, and package cargo of general merchandise on the return trip from the Louisiana port.